

VZCZCXRO6199
RR RUEHPA
DE RUEHFR #6537/01 2750737
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 020737Z OCT 06
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1835
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1326
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 3674
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAHINGEN GE
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS 1754

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 006537

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/29/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [EAID](#) [GV](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: FRANCE/GUINEA: HOW WILL THE SUCCESSION PLAY OUT?

REF: CONAKRY 1446

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The succession question in Guinea remains a focus of French concerns, according to MFA desk officer Damien Syed. President Conte, in ill health, has not done much to prepare for it, and the GOF is concerned that the military, led by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colonel Kerfalla Camara, may attempt to seize power following Conte's death, despite constitutional provisions under which National Assembly Speaker Aboubacar Sompore would assume power. The French have been encouraging a broadening of the political process, including improved dialogue with the opposition and electoral reform, which could unblock about 93 million euro in EU funding. However, French influence in Guinea is limited, with President Chirac not having the kind of personal relationship with Conte that he enjoys (and is able to exploit) with other African leaders. Guinea is stagnating politically, economically, and socially, as Guineans nervously await the post-Conte era. END SUMMARY.

SUCCESSION IS THE MAIN ISSUE

¶2. (C) MFA desk officer for Guinea Damien Syed on September 25 provided an overview of French concerns about Guinea, which he said focused on the succession issue and possible scenarios once President Conte dies. Syed said that Conte's health remained fragile, with trips to Switzerland August 11-17 and earlier this year for medical reasons. Syed said that Conte also appeared to consider Cuba as a possible destination for medical care. Conte could die at any time, Syed believed. The succession issue was playing out against a backdrop of continuing political, economic, and social agitation, with tensions mounting in part because of widespread uncertainty about Guinea's future.

THINGS FALL APART . . .

¶3. (C) Syed added that an eruption of civil unrest, even before Conte's death, remained a possibility. He noted the June riots, growing activism on the part of Guinea's labor unions, and the opposition's continued attempts to "stir up the masses." The labor unions had indicated that they would mobilize again before the end of 2006. In Syed's view, the GOG had not responded to popular and opposition calls for reform, which he attributed to a mixture of "incompetence and cynicism" on the part of the government.

. . . WITH LITTLE FORESIGHT

¶4. (C) Syed said that Conte, as had other African leaders before him, had done little to prepare for succession, even though "he must be aware that he will not be around much

longer." Moreover, there was no son or other immediate family member groomed to take power or suited to do so, Syed said. None of Conte's children had much political experience or demonstrated much skill or interest in statecraft, Syed remarked. The resulting vacuum has proved disquieting for Guineans and concerned observers.

POLITICAL JOCKEYING

15. (C) So far, Conte seemed to enjoy the loyalty of Guinea's military, with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colonel Kerfalla Camara and Camara's adjutant remaining loyal to Conte and enjoying his confidence. Echoing reftel, Syed described continued jockeying among Minister of Presidential Affairs Fode Bangoura, National Assembly Speaker Aboubacar Sompore, and "other members of the political class." Syed noted that under the constitution, Sompore would assume power were Conte to die suddenly.

6 (C) Syed said that Sompore was "very experienced and intelligent" but, fatally, seemed to lack the support of the ruling PUP party, even though Sompore was one of its founders. Sompore had been working the past few months to build popular support by, for example, providing funds to victims of the June riots, and had attempted to build ties to Colonel Camara.

MILITARY SEIZURE OF POWER

17. (C) Colonel Camara, Syed commented, has "said the right things" about loyalty to the state and its institutions, but Syed said that the most likely scenario, once Conte died, would involve a seizure of power by the military, led by Colonel Camara. Syed said that a military coup would of

PARIS 00006537 002 OF 002

course produce broad criticism from the international community, and he was confident that ECOWAS would condemn it.

However, Syed noted that former Prime Minister Cellou Dallein Diallo, removed from office in April 2006, recently told GOF interlocutors that he actually favored a military coup, as it "would probably be better than the alternatives."

The GOF did not agree with Diallo but took note of his implicit criticism of the leadership that other succession scenarios might produce.

FRANCE ENCOURAGES REFORM BUT INFLUENCE IS LIMITED

18. (C) For its part, France has been encouraging reform, a broadening of the political process, and dialogue with the opposition, Syed said. Minister-Delegate for Development, Cooperation, and Francophonie Brigitte Girardin stressed good governance during her visit to Guinea at the end of May. France and others have been gauging progress in Guinea by tracking how recent elections have been managed. Results have been mixed, with some progress but also setbacks, such as the flawed December 2005 elections and its poorly organized election commission. A big test would be the 2007 legislative elections. Syed said that election reform was a critical element to unblocking EU funding for Guinea, which could amount to a total of 93 million euro. Despite this lucrative incentive, Guinea was making slow progress, at best, on the kind of electoral reforms the EU wanted to see.

19. (C) Syed said that France's efforts in Guinea were hampered by the fact that there was not much of a personal relationship between Presidents Chirac and Conte. France has benefited from Chirac's personal ties to other African leaders but these did not exist with Guinea. Conte was a product of Sekou Toure's anti-Western nationalist school, Syed remarked. Minister of Presidential Affairs Bangoura, Syed commented, seemed particularly suspicious of France and Westerners generally.

110. (C) France's presence in Guinea was small, with about 2,700 citizens there, most of whom were involved in the hotel

and restaurant trades. French banks also had a few French representatives in Guinea. Investors and entrepreneurs were discouraged by haphazard business laws, their haphazard enforcement, and the absence of a reliable legal system to resolve disputes. Chinese competition, on the other hand, was growing, Syed remarked.

EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF?

¶11. (C) Syed concluded with the observation that the stagnating political, economic, and social climate, aggravated by overwhelming concern with the succession, was producing an "every man for himself" mentality, in which people and institutions, uncertain about the future and increasingly insecure on many fronts, were looking to protect only their own immediate interests, with no thought given to individual or group sacrifice for the common good. This did not bode well for the future, Syed commented, and he expressed the hope that Conte's passing would not push Guinea into an accelerating downward spiral.

Please visit Paris' Classified Website at:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>
STAPLETON